

MADAME MELBA AND MAY IRWIN--BY ALAN DALE.

May Irwin's Jolly Facial Play.



PERHAPS you think that at the close of a busy week a dramatic critic is able to pigeon-hole his varied impressions neatly and distinctly. Possibly you believe that it all goes by machinery and that the man whose mission it is to tell you his opinion of current productions does so automatically; that he is always cheerful or uncheerful, healthy or dyspeptic; that he never has a pain, never knows a domestic disturbance and is never guilty of a touch of common humanity. That seems to be the general impression.

As I recall the past week, however, I see that my experiences will not pigeon-hole themselves. My mind is chaotic. Perhaps the impressions I received were not striking enough to stamp themselves indelibly upon the memory. You will smile when I tell you that from the restful cloudiness in which I wallow to-day two women emerge, large and pulsant--two women of the week, apparently linked in sisterly association--Melba and May Irwin. What a mind! say you. From the sublime to the ridiculous, you cry, unthinkingly. Imagine thinking in the same mental tank of the petted prima donna who sang the Brundhilde music of "Siegfried" at the Metropolitan, and of the buxom comedienne who has been in-

ducing in "Crappy Dan" and "Ma Lulu" in "Court Into Court" at the Bijou. I confess my guilt. I admit that nothing else remains to me of my week's work. Isn't it cheap and awful? Grieve for me. Pity me. Deplore my Metropolitan-Bijou penitence of mixtures. Excuse me for confusing John J. McNally and Wagner. The best regulated systems fall occasionally. This is just a brief spell of holiday madness. The new year is young. Let me frisk a bit.

When you come to think of it there are really points of similarity between May Irwin and Melba. Both are women; both are exuberant and whole-souled women; both are stars; both are successful stars; both number adherents by the thousand; both sing for a living--whether it be Brundhilde recitativ or "Crappy Dan"--and both are this week holding forth in America's metropolises. There is no rivalry between them, although I am quite convinced that Melba would unhesitatingly admit that she has heard of May Irwin, and May Irwin would unhesitatingly declare that she was not in the least afraid of Melba. Yet, although there is no rivalry, a contest must always be waged in this metropolis, where managers are fighting on the common bread-and-butter ground, and

where art is sunk in the receptive slough of what we call amusement.

Which would you sooner be, little Miss Matinee Girl, Melba or May Irwin? Of course, I am fully aware of the view you take of the lives of these ladies. You see Melba getting a million a week, pampered, swathed in the cotton wool of luxury, tossing diamond tiaras around her dressing room, indulging in champagne footbaths (milk would be absurdly cheap for Melba), and haughtily refusing invitations to the swiftest pink teas, the sumptuous yellow dinners, the elaborate receptions. You hear her ordering Jean de Reszke about the stage, talking saucily to Calve, and taking her salary from Maurice Grau with the tongue! Such triumph! Such glided extravagance! Of course, it captivates you, little Miss Matinee Girl. Melba, in your eyes, is a privileged being, who never has toothache, who never feels the plebeian pangs of a beef-steak hunger, who never hums everyday ditties, who goes through life on golden stilts, that lift her far above the equal and brutality of our ordinary existence.

The traditions of opera foster all this in America, although in other countries such fairy tales would not be credited for an instant. The very atmosphere of the Metropolitan cherishes these Arabian Night imaginings. It is all patchwork and rose leaves perfuming the air for Sarah Jane and Mary Anne. If there were dukes and lords and things of that sort in America, they would all be used as a background for the picture. Fortunately there are not, and that makes matters a trifle more endurable.

Your view of May Irwin, my matinee dame, is less radiant. She is too honest, too sincere, too humorous for any degenerate nonsense to live in her neighborhood. The Cooks' Annual and the Kitchenmaids' Gazette rarely seek her out and picture her toying with her diamond tiaras. Your idea of her is a common one. You see her working hard for enough money to pay for her Summer vacation. You picture her jumping on trains, swallowing hasty sandwiches en route for impossible cities, and associating with cheap Rialto. It is all dreadfully kiff-kiff. You feel a pang of momentary indignation as you reflect that she never poses, and never does the pictorial, and withal manages to be perpetually good-humored and successful.

For Melba, the pace is low and the vol at vent a la danciere! For May Irwin the crawler and the hard-boiled egg! Yet I repeat, which would you sooner be, Melba or May Irwin?

Melba has this week reached what she undoubtedly considers the pinnacle of her career. She has sung Brundhilde in German at the Metropolitan Opera House. She has brought her healthy, Australian-bush entity into contact with the feverishly languorous, sonorous Wagnerian story. She has dedicated her marvelous gift of voice upon the shrine of a cult, and has started in to cater to the musical humbugs and hypocrites, and to the few whose peculiar cerebral lobes are able to find real enjoyment in such works as "Siegfried" and "Tristan und Isolde." Melba has made caviare of herself in obedience to what she probably considered to be her duty, and she has waived her claims to spontaneous admiration in favor of those of the hot-house, exotic order. We cannot all pretend to enjoy "Siegfried." Nordan has told us that it is not at all necessary we should do so.

"The lovers in his pieces behave like tempests gone mad," he says rithely, "trailing in contortions and convulsions over a roof of valerian. They reflect a state of mind to the poet which is well-known to the professional expert. Wagner suffered from erotic madness which leads coarse natures to murder for lust and inspires higher degenerates with works like 'Die Walkure,' 'Siegfried' and 'Tristan und Isolde.'"

I quote this just to show those who have no time to bother with Nordan that it is no disgrace to feel ennui and irritation during the performance of a Wagnerian opera, and to indicate the fact that Melba, in her quest for glory, is willing to pass away from the unloyal allegiance of the multitude to the highly-spiced appreciation of the Wagnerian clique.

And isn't it odd, that even as I write these words, I see the voluminous figure of May Irwin on the hop before me? Perhaps I am suffering from hallucinations or something equally evil this morning. I am inclined to believe that this must be the case. My distorted view pictures May Irwin as Brundhilde, singing while Jean de Reszke embraces her--for has not Miss Irwin herself told us that the one advantage of a large mouth is that you can kiss and talk at the same time? I wonder how the moaning, gurgling, soulful strains of "Siegfried" would fare with Miss Irwin's fat, blithe personality as a human spot on their musical inhumanity? I wonder how they would sound with any healthy, vitalized intelligence in collision with their Dead Sea fruit?

Perhaps one of these days when Miss

Irwin has tired of the fatiguing joys of persistent success in such base and trivial efforts as "The Widow Jones" and "Court Into Court," she may possibly be induced to tackle Wagner. Why not? I don't believe that Melba would ever have contemplated a Wagnerian halo if it had not been for the arch persuasion of Jean de Reszke. He was the villain who lured her to the precipice to gloat over her whirling body as it dropped into the dark pool beneath. Such a glad, healthy, jolly creature as Melba was, too. She was a good fellow, they tell me; a jovial comrade, a pleasant and a charitable associate. And now she has gone over to the Wagner cult, and long-haired critics will talk to her about Bayreuth and Frau Cosima and dim lights and Parsifal and leit-motif--and all the rest of it. Isn't it sad?

Don't imagine for a moment that in temporarily associating "Siegfried" with "Crappy Dan" I am instituting any comparison between those very different forms of music. I am not. I deny it. Don't accuse me of insinuating that the thousands of people who flock to hear May Irwin are better citizens than the Metropolitan Opera House subscribers who sit through "Siegfried" with the rapt expression of bled owls on their faces. I am innocent. I may think my little thubbs, but, although I dare a great deal, I hesitate at expressing those that deal with this subject.

With the picture of Melba and May Irwin linked together like Siamese twinnesses before me, however, I feel it my duty to take up the cudgels for May Irwin. I do so, my matinee damsel, because, as I have already told you, I realize that your view of Melba is so infinitely more attractive than that of May Irwin. I do so, also, to excuse--if it be possible to excuse--the disgraceful mental confusion that shows me the two ladies together. I am quite as vexed at myself as you can possibly be vexed at me. I never imagined that my infamy would lead me to compare Bayreuth with Hoboken, N. J.

Let me hasten to say that my May Irwin is an artist to the very finger tips--just as keen and accomplished in her enviable comedy line as Melba is in her flexible, musical direction. Miss Irwin did not spring suddenly into metropolitan prominence last season with "The Widow Jones," as the uninitiated imagine. She has been an artist for years. My humorous friend James L. Ford informed me the other day that May Irwin was just as delightful sixteen years ago as she is to-day. "The bootblacks discovered her first," said he. "Then the dramatic critics felt that she was clever. After that came the public. And now it is society." No artist could desire a better endorsement. My own opinion is that dramatic critics are largely dependent upon the impartial judgment of the bootblacks. They are after all the best theatre patrons that we have. They pay out their hard-earned money; the managers never try to intimidate them. Fads never penetrate to their humble obscurity. They have just as much brain and just as much intelligence as the tiaras of the Metropolitan Opera House, and when they love they love reasonably.



"Melba has reached the pinnacle of her fame."

If it was the bootblacks who discovered May Irwin, we are heavily indebted to them. They have given us a subtle, smiling lady who could drive the cobwebs away from the loneliest cranium. Miss Irwin has no hobby to exploit, no cult to protect. Her mission on this earth is magnetic jollity--the noblest mission that exists. She is here to bring laughter to the dislocated lips of our metropolitan mummies. Her object is to lure us away from the tragedy of our own entities; to cause us to forget; to give us a few hours of felicitous oblivion with no faked-up nonsense about it and no ridiculous pretensions.

You may say that this is the object of every vaudeville performer, from the woman who ties herself into a knot and then unties herself to the strains of slow music to the woman who shrieks on the roof garden about poor Bessie's vacant plunfore--and so it is. But it is reserved for the few to hallow that object by an artistic value that is irresistible. May Irwin is the American Jolie, but she is wholly, absolutely, and unreservedly American. There is no foreign clime about her art. It is a home product, and in these days when home products are relegated to the background for the sake of those marked with the foreign links, it is a good thing to shriek a little and do the patriotic.

I have imagined May Irwin singing Brundhilde in "Siegfried." Absurd though it may seem, and irreverent--I can imagine it. Even my illimitable imagination, however, fails to perceive Melba warbling "Crappy Dan" in "Court Into Court," or taking part in feasts of repartee with John C. Rice. Melba can sing a great deal, but she cannot act. She has no vestige of "temperament." She is cold, perfect and non-magnetic, as a rule. May Irwin, on the other hand, can slug just enough to show us that she is not physically shut out from the sublime world of melody, and she can act better than any other comedienne on the American stage. She has temperament enough to inspire an entire company. She is warm, imperfect--adorably imperfect--and magnetic. There is nothing human that May Irwin couldn't do. If she tried Brundhilde, real nineteenth century blood would pulsate through that heroine's veins, instead of Wagnerian lymph. What would Melba do in "Court Into Court"? Can you see her walking through the role, icily speaking saucy lines to the members of the cast, and feverishly injecting fireworks and roundels into "Ma Lulu" and "Mistah Johnson?"

Which would you sooner be, Miss Matinee Girl--May Irwin or Melba? Don't jump up impetuously and cry "Melba," without a moment's thought. I will set your minds at rest on one point--the diamond tiaras point. Miss Irwin, in her quiet and picturesque way, is probably just as rich at the end of a season as is the Australian prima donna. There are as gorgeous jewels attached to the story of her private life; there are no European triumphs held up for the intimidation of this herd-like public. But, take my word for it, she could buy tiaras for her fair, glossy hair if she wanted them--also "rings for her fingers, and rings for her toes." She could swish around in a glory of silken lingerie, and--I persist in believing that she could enjoy the European triumphs if she cared enough about them to go seek them.

Comparisons are odious, but one rank in life, provided it be an honored and an artistic one, is just as praiseworthy as another. Just now, foolish people are agitating the question as to whether it be undignified for a dramatic artist to accept engagements at the vaudeville houses. They want to know whether the haughty, blue-lipped gentlemen who stand in dignified idleness, at the corners of "the Rialto," waiting, Micawber-like, for something to "turn up," are belittling themselves by accepting money from Mr. Keith and Mr. Proctor, with which to pay their board bills, support their families, and live reputable busy lives. Some of these gentlemen may have starred in "Hamlet," or headed their serio-comic opera companies, or plucked big metropolitan productions. Are they injuring their "profession" by catering to the amusement of the public in another way?

Senseless genius! Hideous monster of false pride! The vaudeville artist is as useful and as enviable in her way as the saturnine "star" who shouts Othello and Iago into your ears. May Irwin's death would be just as much of a loss to the community as that of Melba. Art knows no nationality and no variation. The Bijou Theatre is just as fit a resort for the "Four Hundred" as the Metropolitan Opera House--only they don't believe it. It is only a "faddy" mob that confines its enthusiasm to one edifice only. Real music lovers found Colonel Mapleson's attempt at grand opera quite as justifiable as that of Mr. Grau. Mapleson sank because he was trying to fight a fad, and for no other reason.

And so my composite mental picture of

Melba and May Irwin is not so very extraordinary, after all. There is just as much merit in one artist as there is in the other. Sarah Bernhardt and Yvette Guilbert, Sir Henry Irving and Albert Chevalier, Calve and Letty Lind, Jean de Reszke and J. E. Dodson, are all in the same category. If you will take the trouble to examine that category closely, and see of what it is in reality made, I know that you would jump in consternation when you realized that I was going to talk of Melba and May Irwin on the same page.

As a matter of fact, in the world of amusements we need a large variety of dishes to tickle the palate into responsiveness. An exclusive diet of Melba would be as appalling and as indigestible as an exclusive diet of May Irwin. The intellectual appetite is very like the gastronomic need. You have heard of quail-eating contests, in which the competitors sicken and rebel at persistent doses of the succulent birdlet. So it is with our cerebral entertainments. I presume that there are people who attend every performance of Italian opera given throughout the season at the Metropolitan Opera House. They have my sympathy. I

can imagine no ghastlier a fate than these ever recurring doses of operatic porridges. On the other hand, I should not like to undertake a series of nightly visits to the Bijou Theatre to see "Court Into Court." Constant change is the spice of life. Melba is a foil to Miss Irwin; Miss Irwin is a foil from Melba. It is all due to historical law, and you couldn't alter it if you wished to do so.

When you hear of opera enthusiasts turning up patrician noses as they alight on lighter form of entertainment, tell them that they are a pack of humbugs, and the edicts of nature are flat against them. When you meet flippant, callow boys, insist that vaudeville and musical comedies are the only things in the world of amusement necessary to cultivate, impress upon them the fact that they will grow bushy satiated before their hair is tinged with gray. Everything has its uses and its abuses. Nothing, per se, is absurd.

The artist who doesn't bore you is your real benefactor. Melba generally interests May Irwin; never fails to do so. While would you sooner be, Miss Matinee Girl, Melba or May Irwin? ALAN DALE.



Melba---"Cold, perfect and non-magnetic."



Irwin---"Warm, imperfect--adorably perfect--and magnetic."

MUSIC A LA GOLF.

A Classical Musicale, in Which the Performers Played According to the Code of the Links.

In these days, when golf is crowding in popularity every other form of outdoor sport, it is also in England, at least, giving a freshness and variety to musical criticism which will be appreciated by the lay mind that is not educated up to a knowledge of the technical terms usually employed in describing musical events. Here is a report, taken from a recent London paper, of a "classical" concert at St. James's Hall:

"An enormous crowd assembled last Monday night to witness the famous competition over the St. James's Hall Links. Punctually at 8 o'clock Dr. Joachim

drove off from the tee, Signor Platt responding with a lovely low shot, which left Mr. Gibson within easy reach of the green with his brassie. Mr. Ries foisted the second subject, and Dr. Joachim was badly bunkered, but using his niblick on the G string in masterly style laid his ball dead, and the first movement was halted amid great enthusiasm.

"Starting one up at the scherzo, Signor Platt began the second movement, and outdrove Dr. Joachim by at least twenty bars. Mr. Gibson approached cleverly, and in the trio there was nothing to choose between the opponents, the coda (con word) resulting in another half. Mr. Gibson and Signor Platt were now dorny, but the latter being obliged to play pawky round a dangerous pizicato passage, lost a good deal of ground; as Dr. Joachim's drive and Mr. Ries's second were both long and straight."

WINE FOR THE POOR.

Startling Statistics from Parisian Charitable Organizations of Wine Given Charity Patients.

Some interesting statistics have just been published by the municipal government of Paris in regard to that department known as the Assistance Publique, or Charities. From these it appears that it took last year 875,000 gallons of good red wine to cool the fever-parched throats of the sick in the hospitals of that city. This wine cost 1,865,000 francs, or about \$373,000, exclusive of the incidental expenses in carrying for and disposing of it. The quantity has been increasing each year, keeping pace with the growth of the hospital population, and it has now been found necessary to build a new vault.

WILLINTEREST CREDITORS

A Kansas Blacksmith Invents a New and Happy Way Collecting of Old Debts.

Debt collecting is not an easy process in Kansas. This fact has long weighed on the mind of Mr. Fred Westhoff, blacksmith, of Wathena, who is obliged to give credit to the farmers for whom he works. After long thought he decided to try a new method of debt collecting.

To all his debtors he sent out the following instruction:

"As I have to meet payment of a note I find it necessary to call upon all those who are indebted to me to help me out as much as you can. Therefore, I have

decided to select one day, and kindly request your presence at my shop at Wathena, and pay the amount herein stated, and to all those complying with this request will receive a special treat. Lunch and refreshments will be served from 1 p. m. to 6 p. m. in my basement that day, and a very good time assured to all present. Please present this card when you call, and show the amount of your account, which is --- dollars and --- cents. Hoping all will respond, and you will have a good social afternoon."

The treat offered was a great inducement to the thrifty Kansas farmers. It was all the more attractive because beer was provided, and Kansas is a prohibition State. Hardly one of those who came had the cheek to refuse to pay his bill, and the entertainment was a great success. The scheme will be employed regularly by Mr. Westhoff.

WOMEN AND PAIN.

Some Experiments Which Show That Suffer Less Than Men.

Dr. Ottolenghi, a European physician, has been conducting experiments with an instrument called a facsimeter to determine sensitiveness to pain in between men and women. He tried it upon 682 women with remarkable results.

He finds that women are less sensitive to pain than men, and that this sensitiveness is less in early life, increases to the twenty-fourth year, and decreases after that. The higher classes are more sensitive and the degenerate least. He finds the later class very obtuse in the location of pain.